



Introduction

The *Veterinary Practice Act 2003* (Act) (s 4(3)) states that a person is considered to suffer an impairment if the person suffers from any physical or mental impairment, disability, condition or disorder which detrimentally affects or is likely to detrimentally affect the person's physical or mental capacity to practise veterinary science. Habitual drunkenness or addiction to a deleterious drug is considered to be a physical or mental disorder (s 4(3)).

The Board may become aware that a veterinarian is impaired or possibly impaired through:

1. A self-declaration using the Annual Return (as required under s 33(1)(b)) or at any other time
2. Notification by a health practitioner
3. Notification by a colleague
4. A complaint investigation

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the processes to be adopted by the Board when placing a veterinarian with an impairment or possible impairment into the Board's Health Program.

Policy

The Board appreciates the difficulties faced by a veterinarian suffering from an impairment and is committed to assisting these veterinarians through its Health Program for Veterinarians. The goal of this program is to enable veterinarians to work their way through their health issues with the support of suitably qualified professionals and the Board. The Board has adopted the procedures outlined in the [Doctors' Health Program](#) provided by the Medical Council of NSW to achieve this goal.

Importantly, it is the Board's preference that issues of impairment or possible impairment are addressed outside of the Board's complaints processes and disciplinary powers where possible.

Procedure

1. If the Board is aware or has a reasonable suspicion that a veterinarian is suffering from or may be suffering from an impairment, the Board will notify the veterinarian in writing and invite that veterinarian to attend an examination by a Board appointed health practitioner.
2. Notification in writing above will include information on further resources and assistance to veterinarians suffering an impairment. This information is also available from the Board's website.
3. The Board will meet the costs of this examination but will not meet costs, if applicable, to a cancelled appointment. A copy of the report from the Board appointed health practitioner resulting from this examination will be provided to the veterinarian.
4. The purpose of this examination is to determine, based on a report from a Board appointed health practitioner, whether the veterinarian is impaired and in need of the support provided by the Board's Health Program.
5. If the veterinarian refuses to undergo an examination by a Board appointed health practitioner as requested, the Board may be satisfied that there is a risk to health and safety of any person, a risk to health and welfare of animals, or that the veterinarian suffers from an impairment and place a condition on the veterinarian's registration requiring the veterinarian to undergo an examination by a health practitioner at a specified time and place in accordance with s 19(3)(b), (c) or (f).
6. Alternatively, if the veterinarian refuses to undergo an examination by a Board appointed health practitioner as requested, the Board may raise a complaint against the veterinarian and require the veterinarian to undergo an examination by a specified health practitioner at a specified time and place in accordance with s 45A. The matter will then be treated in accordance with Part 5 of the Act.
7. If, based on the report of this health practitioner and other available information, the Board is satisfied that the veterinarian is suffering from an impairment, the Board will enter that veterinarian's name on the register of impaired veterinarians and may impose conditions on the veterinarian's registration in accordance with s 19(3)(f).
8. The Board will notify the veterinarian involved in writing of the imposition of any registration conditions.
9. The Board will invite the veterinarian to a meeting of the Board or Health Committee of the Board to discuss the findings and recommendations from this report including the imposition of any registration conditions. The veterinarian may bring a support person to this interview.
10. If disciplinary action is taken against a person because the person suffers from an impairment, the reason for the disciplinary action, and any other information relating to the impairment of the person, is not to be recorded in the register of disciplinary action (s 63(2)).



Health Program for Veterinarians

Issue	June 2018
Review	Annually
Ref number	PR05

Monitoring

- i. The Registrar will provide a report to the Board each year regarding the status of all veterinarians listed on the register of impaired veterinarians
- ii. Veterinarians on the register of impaired veterinarians will be required to attend an examination by a Board appointed health practitioner at least annually
- iii. The Board will review compliance with and any feedback regarding this program annually for the purpose of continuous improvement
- iv. The Registrar will consult with the Medical Council of NSW regularly to ensure that suitable adjustments to the Doctors' Health Program are incorporated into the Health Program for Veterinarians.

Training and Communication

The Registrar is responsible for ensuring that all persons who are involved in making a decision in relation to the Health Program for Veterinarians receive training in the implementation of this policy.

Conflict of Interest

Members of the Board must comply with the Code of Conduct for Board Members in relation to decisions regarding the placing of conditions on a veterinarian's registration.

Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually or as required to ensure that it remains capable of achieving the goal of the Health Program, appropriate to the operations of the Board and compliant with the relevant legislation.